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A lesson from social media

Social media have transformed the very notion of knowledge, writes Claudia Megele, and social workers can engage with the various forms to aid their continuing professional development

Social work operates within a knowledge economy and one in which its practitioners are expected to take responsibility for their own training and development. But, even in this age of social media-borne knowledge, the profession seems to lack the cultural orientation and fundamental awareness and expertise in knowledge transfer and knowledge management.

It is vital, therefore, that continuing professional development (CPD) and post-qualifying proposals include provision for knowledge transfer and knowledge management mechanisms, expertise and technologies and their use and application in social work.

Use of social media can be key but how they are used is even more important.

Practically everyone uses internet search engines; the verb to google has even found its way into our dictionaries, so routine is the practice. But, with hundreds if not thousands of search results, practitioners must be able to distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, as well as between the relevant and irrelevant. Hence, in a world with an explosion of information, curating is an essential skill for all professionals.

Collaborative competence and the ability to work interprofessionally with an interdisciplinary approach are fundamental requirements for contemporary social work practice. Social media offer flexible platforms for interprofessional exchange and learning so that participants can develop and enhance their collaborative competence.

Social workers must embrace what is

➤ OPINION

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➤ POLICY

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clearly more than a trend. Social media have transformed the medium and the meaning of communication, participation, inclusion and exclusion, and the manner in which we relate to each other. Therefore, CPD programmes should develop practitioners' e-professionalism and social media competences to enable them to navigate this new landscape effectively.

Further, considering the fast-evolving socio-economic and policy contexts, it is important that social workers keep abreast of relevant developments in social work as well as related professions. Social media facilitate this process and raise practitioners' awareness.

The above-mentioned collaborative competences can serve as the basis to initiate multi-professional co-operation and interdisciplinary action research that can enhance both the content and quality of CPD programmes. Action research and collaborative competences will valorise and organically build on the existing expertise within each organisation. This in turn will serve as an invaluable organisational resource as well as boost practitioners' knowledge, competences and morale through positive engagement.

Action research conducted by practitioners and focused on tackling relevant practice issues can offer employers a 'payback' and an added incentive to sponsor their staff's CPD training.

Research and surveys indicate that unavailability of conveniently located CPD programmes and the fixed time commitment to such programmes pose obstacles for most practitioners. Social media enable providers and practitioners to overcome both of these obstacles. Programmes can be offered online and on a modular and continuous basis. This enables practitioners to engage in such programmes on a flexible and on-demand basis and to overcome the barriers of time and place. The on-demand nature of such programmes will allow practitioners to engage in programmes that match their learning needs. Furthermore, such self-paced programmes can maximise learning outcomes as they allow individuals to develop their knowledge and skills based on their preferred

learning styles.

Social media support and enable social learning and an experiential culture of learning by doing and practice-based knowledge recognition and development. Social learning environments are essential to capture and valorise the practice wisdom, and that provides a major individual and organisational resource.

Moreover, social media enable providers to offer an interactive learning community rather than a uni-directional tutor-to-learner approach. This is intellectually and socially stimulating, and offers a richer and more rewarding learning experience for participants.



There are many reasons why social work should have a better engagement in social media

There are many reasons why social work should have a better engagement in social media. However, I consider the most important to be the facilitative platform social media offer for achieving social work's main objectives of greater equity and an enhanced social justice. Social media provide social work and its practitioners a unique opportunity for challenging power imbalances and exclusion imposed by structural hierarchies.

As noted by the pedagogy theorist, Paulo Freire, such structural hierarchies serve as the apparatus of power that construct and constrain all actions. Social media offer the opportunity for displacing and replacing such rigid structures with fluid ad hoc heterarchies that can reclaim power through creation of new spaces for dialogue and a more dynamic social interaction. Therefore, it is essential that all CPD programmes embrace such critical pedagogy. **SWM**

Claudia Megele is a senior lecturer

for the MSc programme at Hertfordshire University and the Chair of Tower Hamlets Police and Community Safety Board. She is also author and researcher and has published her works with Cambridge Scholars Publishers, Palgrave Macmillan, Sage Publications and others.

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THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK MAGAZINE 25